



Seattle, Washington

The Rainy City

BY PHYLLIS MCINTOSH

Mention Seattle and most Americans immediately think of rain. But Seattle's reputation as the "rainy city" is not entirely deserved. While it is cloudy and misty much of the time, especially in winter, the city actually receives less annual rainfall than many cities in the eastern United States.

Located in the state of Washington in the northwest corner of the United States, Seattle is the largest city in the Pacific Northwest region and a magnet for business conventions and for tourists from all over the world. While the weather may partly explain why Seattle is famous for indoor attractions like coffee shops, bookstores, and art galleries, it does not prevent residents and visitors alike from enjoying a wide range of outdoor activities. Nor does it dampen their enthusiasm for a metropolis that boasts some of the most beautiful scenery in the country, is home both to world famous industries and world-class arts, and has the most highly educated populace of any large American city.



This monument on Alki Point marks the “Birthplace of Seattle,” where the first European settlers landed in 1851.

From Duwamps to Greater Seattle

Archeological evidence suggests that the Seattle area has been inhabited for at least 4,000 years, but, possibly because there was no rich farmland nearby, the first permanent European settlers did not arrive until 1851. In November of that year, the Denny Party from Illinois landed at Alki Point in what is now west Seattle. After enduring a stormy winter at Alki, most of the settlers moved across the bay to a more protected site and named their new village “Dewamps” or “Duwamps”

after the nearby Duwamish River and the Duwamish tribe of Native Americans.

Fortunately, in 1852, the town’s first merchant, “Doc” Maynard, persuaded the inhabitants to change the unmelodious name to Seattle in honor of Chief Sealth (also known as Chief Seattle), a Native American leader who had befriended the newcomers.

Early growth was fueled by the area’s abundant natural resources, especially fisheries and forests. The term *Skid Road* is thought to have originated in Seattle as the name for the steep hill where logs were slid down to Henry Yesler’s sawmill near the wharf. Because skid road areas in Seattle and other logging towns were often rough neighborhoods brimming with bars, brothels, and bums, the term *skid road* and later *skid row* came to mean the rundown section of any city.

After the railroad extended to Tacoma, some 40 miles to the south, in 1883, Seattle was able to ship its lumber eastward and south to California, and the city became a rough and tumble boomtown that attracted more than 1,000 newcomers every month. But in 1889, a great fire destroyed virtually all the wooden structures in the downtown area, and Seattle was forced to start anew.

Luckily, another economic boom was on the horizon. When gold was discovered in 1896 along the Klondike River in the Yukon Territory of Canada, Seattle became the gateway and supply point for prospectors heading north. Ironically, Seattle merchants probably got richer from the gold rush than the fortune-seekers hoping to stake a claim in the Klondike.

At the turn of the century, local entrepreneurs established businesses in Seattle that still rank among America’s leading companies. In 1900, timber baron Frederick Weyerhaeuser bought a million acres of railroad land and founded what has become the international Weyerhaeuser forest products company. The new century also saw the founding of the Amer-



ican Messenger Company, now UPS; Nordstrom's department store, destined to become a nationwide chain of upscale stores; and Eddie Bauer casual clothing stores, founded by the man who manufactured the first goose down parka.

Proud of their success, the citizens of Seattle in 1909 staged the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, similar to a World's Fair, to showcase the resources and products of the region. Held on the grounds of the fledgling University of Washington, the exposition tripled the number of buildings on the campus, which has since become one of the largest and most prestigious public universities in the country.

In perhaps the most fortuitous development of all, in 1916 a man named William Boeing launched a small airplane manufacturing company that would grow into the giant aerospace and defense corporation that would dominate the economy of Seattle for decades to come.

Mountains, Sea, and College Degrees

Today, Seattle is home to 572,000 people; more than three million live in the greater metropolitan area. According to U.S. Census data, more than half of all Seattle residents are college graduates, the highest percentage of any major American



city. Many are drawn not only by Seattle's high tech industries and academic institutions but also by its pleasing scenery and mild climate.

The city is situated approximately 100 miles south of the Canadian border between Puget Sound, an inlet of the Pacific Ocean, and Lake Washington. To the west are the Olympic Peninsula and the Olympic Mountains; to the east is the Cascade Mountain range. Modern Seattle covers 142 square miles (369 square kilometers), of which more than 40 percent is water.

Not surprisingly, boats are a major source of transportation around the region. The Washington State Ferry System is the largest in the United States and the third largest in the world, carrying

(Top) Seattle is located on Puget Sound, an inlet of the Pacific Ocean. The city covers 142 square miles, of which more than 40 percent is water.

(Above) In Seattle, boats are a major form of transportation. Here a ferryboat, with an array of sailboats alongside it, follows its course across the Port of Seattle.



This fighter jet and 38 other full-size aircraft hang in the Great Gallery of the Museum of Flight in Seattle. These aircraft represent the first 100 years of aviation history.

more than 25 million passengers a year aboard vessels operating from 20 terminals. The ferries themselves range from small, passenger-only craft to jumbo vessels that carry 2,500 passengers and more than 200 cars.

The abundant water keeps temperatures moderate, so that summer highs average in the mid-70s (Fahrenheit) and winter highs in the 40s and 50s. As in much of the U.S. Pacific Coastal region, the summers are typically dry and the winters wet. Despite its reputation for being unusually rainy, Seattle receives only about 37 inches of rainfall a year, less than such places as New York City and Washington, D.C. But unlike eastern cities where the skies clear after a rainy spell, Seattle remains cloudy and often misty and drizzly an average of 200 days a year.

The city is hilly in terrain and, like Rome, is said to be built on seven hills. It also sits on an earthquake zone and has experienced several large quakes, most recently a 6.8 magnitude temblor in 2001 that caused more than one billion dollars in damage to the older part of the city.

The nearby water, hills, forests, and mountains create spectacular scenery and offer numerous opportunities for outdoor activities, such as sailing, skiing, camping, and hiking. Perhaps that is why *Men's Fitness* magazine has named Seattle the most physically fit city in the United States.

The dominant landscape feature in the Seattle region is 14,410-foot-high Mount Rainier, the highest peak in the Cascade Range, which lies some 50 miles south of the city. It is the centerpiece of Mount Rainier National Park, known for its glaciers, waterfalls, old growth forests, and subalpine meadows.

The most notorious mountain in the region, however, is Mount St. Helens, site of a major volcanic eruption in 1980 that killed 57 people, destroyed 200 square miles of forest, and spewed out a cloud of ash that circumnavigated the globe. Shock waves from the blast rattled windows and shook dishes off shelves in the Seattle area, 96 miles away.

Jet City and Coffee Town

Although Seattle is home to 14 companies on the Fortune 500 list of largest U.S. firms, the city is most famously associated with the Boeing Company aircraft manufacturer, computer software giant Microsoft, and coffee purveyor Starbucks.

Boeing has driven the local economy for so long that Seattle is sometimes called "Jet City." From a small manufacturer of seaplanes in 1916, Boeing grew to become the primary producer of the B-17 and B-29 bombers flown by the U.S. military during World War II. After the war, the company introduced the first passenger jet and by the 1960s was the leading maker of commercial jets, the B-52 bomber, and the Saturn V booster for the Apollo moon missions. Boeing's job cuts during an economic downturn in the 1970s led so many people to depart Seattle that someone erected a billboard reading "Will the last person to leave

Seattle turn off the lights?” Although Boeing moved its corporate headquarters to Chicago in 2001, its major assembly plants remain in Seattle, and the company is still the city’s largest private employer.

After “flying high” with Boeing for six decades, Seattle soared into the information technology age when local school pals Bill Gates and Paul Allen established their fledgling computer software company, Microsoft, in a Seattle suburb in 1979. Although the city was hard hit when many of the smaller high tech companies failed in the late 1990s, Seattle is still home to online giant Amazon.com and to Microsoft, now the world’s dominant software company.

All those computer whizzes, aircraft workers, and most other Seattle residents love their coffee. So, it is no surprise that the city is equally famous for spawning several gourmet coffee companies, most notably the international sensation Starbucks, which now has more than 14,000 stores in 42 countries.

Whatever companies come and go, water remains a vital element of Seattle commerce, and the abundance of waterways has given rise to a thriving shipping industry. In 1917, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed the Lake Washington Ship Canal, which links Puget

Sound with Lake Union in the heart of Seattle and Lake Washington on the city’s eastern shore. Today, the canal serves as an urban waterway for pleasure boats and kayakers, as well as commercial vessels heading out to sea.

The Port of Seattle is the fifth largest containerized shipping facility in the United States with 450 acres of container-handler space and 25 large cranes. Fisherman’s Terminal, with moorage for 700 boats, is home to the U.S. North Pacific fishing fleet. In addition, two cruise ship terminals serve five major cruise lines and host 150 ships and 250,000 passengers a year.

Despite the prominence of its shipping industry and companies such as Boeing, Microsoft, and Starbucks, the largest employer in Seattle is none of these. That honor belongs to the 40,000-student University of Washington (UW), the oldest public university on the West Coast. Many UW academic programs are considered to be among the best in the nation, and the university as a whole is regarded as one of the finest institutions of higher learning in the world. The renowned UW School of Medicine consistently ranks as the best in the nation for primary care and as one of the top recipients of federal funding for medical research.

(Below) Seattle’s favorite beverage.

(Bottom) A cruise ship sets sail from the Port of Seattle with majestic Mount Rainier in the background.



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Pike Place Market, the oldest continually operating farmers' market in the United States, offers a wide array of fresh fish, fruits, vegetables, and ethnic foods as well as many specialty shops.



Fresh fruits tempt Seattle shoppers at Pike Place Market.



A totem pole facing the Pioneer Building, in the heart of Seattle's historic district, attracts the attention of visitors to the museums and art galleries in this area.

Attractions, Arts, and Athletics

Not surprisingly, a city as vibrant as Seattle offers a wealth of attractions and cultural and leisure time activities for tourists and residents alike. Some of the most popular places in town include:

- **Pike Place Market.** Dating back to 1907, it is the oldest continually-operating farmers' market in the United States. The nine-block area features fresh fish and produce stands, flower stalls, arts and crafts, ethnic foods, vintage clothing and antique shops, street musicians, international restaurants and cafes—and the original Starbucks coffee store, which opened in 1971.
- **Pioneer Square.** This historic district, where Seattle began, features 26 square blocks of Victorian buildings and warehouses now occupied by museums, art galleries, restaurants, and cafes. A victim of the Great Fire of 1889 and the earthquake of 2001, the still thriving neighborhood is a testament to the city's resilience.
- **Seattle Center.** Site of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, this 74-acre urban park is home to the famous Space Needle, the Pacific Science Center, and various museums and theaters. One of the more unusual attractions is the Experience Music Project, a museum

dedicated to American popular music housed in a building said to resemble a smashed guitar. It contains the world's largest collection of memorabilia relating to the late rock star and Seattle native Jimi Hendrix, who liked to end his shows by (you guessed it) smashing his guitar. Seattle Center also hosts the annual arts festival known as Bumbershoot—another word for umbrella and a light-hearted reference to the city's rainy reputation.

- **Seattle Central Library.** In a city with the highest percentage of library card holders in the United States, it is fitting that one of the architectural gems is the public library. Opened in 2004, the building features an unorthodox design of five glass and steel platforms that gives it an open, translucent look and allows passersby to look in and see activity on every floor. Inside, an innovative “books spiral,” a series of flat tiers connected by gentle ramps, winds through four floors and houses most of the nonfiction collection in one continuous run. The design allows the library to easily expand its nonfiction holdings without having to move books to other areas and enables patrons to move throughout the entire collection without using stairs, escalators, or elevators.

In addition to the library, the city's cultural icons include the Seattle Art Museum, with its famous outdoor metal sculpture of a 48-foot-tall hammering man; the century-old Seattle Symphony, one of the most recorded orchestras in the world; and the Seattle Opera, celebrated for staging the works of Richard Wagner. At the other end of the music spectrum, Seattle also gave rise in the 1990s to “grunge” music—alternative rock popularized by such bands as Nirvana and Pearl Jam.

Along with the arts, sports rank high in Seattle. Fans can cheer major league teams in all of America's top three specta-

tor sports—baseball, basketball, and football. The Seattle Mariners baseball team and the Seattle Seahawks football team play in new, state-of-the-art stadiums located near Pioneer Square.

Some Final Famous Firsts

As if its rich history and lists of attractions and accomplishments were not enough, the Queen City of the Northwest (yet another Seattle nickname) boasts a number of lesser known firsts. According to Seattle's Convention and Visitor's Bureau:

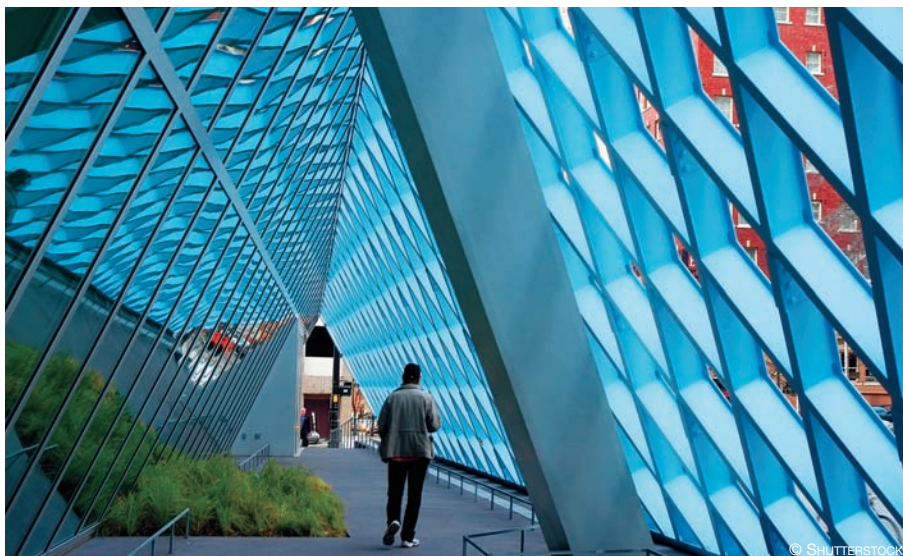
- Seattle residents buy more sunglasses per capita than people in another U.S. city, perhaps because they are so appreciative when the sun does appear.
- *Bicycling* magazine has named Seattle among the 10 best American cities for cycling, which no doubt explains why a higher percentage of people bike to work in Seattle than in any other U.S. city of similar size.
- Seattle's shores are lined with more houseboats that people live aboard year-round—about 500—than any other American city.
- At 62 stories, Seattle's city hall is taller than any other in the country.
- Because more than half the population has had some training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the city's medical emergency response system boasts the best life-saving rate in the nation, Seattle has been dubbed the best place in the United States to have a heart attack.

With all of Seattle's numerous claims to fame, who needs sunshine?

Websites of Interest

www.seattle.gov

The official website of the city of Seattle, this provides a wealth of information about climate, government, arts and recreation, and points of interest for visitors.



www.visitseattle.org

This site of Seattle's Convention and Visitors Bureau offers sightseeing tips, suggested itineraries, and a guide to local attractions, dining, and lodging.

www.historylink.org

Calling itself the Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, this site allows readers to click on history briefs and slide shows about Seattle and to search by topic or time period.

seattlepi.nwsourc.com/century

This website features a special report from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* newspaper that gives decade-by-decade highlights of Seattle history.

www.spaceneedle.com

This official site of the Space Needle provides interesting historic details and fun facts about Seattle's most famous landmark.

(Top) Seattle's public library, opened in 2004, is known for its modern architecture. The library houses about a million books and materials and provides 400 computers for public use.

(Above) This houseboat on Union Lake is one of about 500 houseboats that line Seattle's shores. Most people live aboard houseboats in Seattle than in any other American city.

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Seattle's Space Needle, with its revolving restaurant and observation deck, is the city's number one tourist attraction.



Symbol of Seattle

The most recognizable landmark on the Seattle skyline is the 605-foot-tall Space Needle, constructed as the futuristic symbol of the 1962 World's Fair, whose theme was Century 21. Featuring a 500-foot-high revolving restaurant and an observation deck at 520 feet, the Needle remains Seattle's number one tourist attraction.

When it opened on April 21, 1962, the first day of the World's Fair, the Space Needle was the tallest building west of the Mississippi River. During the Fair, more than 2.3 million people—nearly 20,000 a day—rode to the top. The original elevators were replaced in 1993 with computerized models that travel 10 miles per hour, or as fast as a raindrop falls to earth.

Built to withstand winds of 200 miles per hour, the Space Needle has weathered several earthquakes, including a 6.8 magnitude quake in 2001. Over the years it has hosted numerous weddings, six parachute jumps, and, tragically, a couple of suicides.

Another symbol of the World's Fair still in operation is an elevated monorail that travels just over a mile from Seattle Center to a downtown shopping mall. Originally designed as a model for future mass transit—and more immediately to transport visitors from downtown to the fair site—the monorail still carries more than two million passengers a year.

The fair itself, which ranks as one of the few world's fairs ever to turn a profit, drew international attention to Seattle and mobilized local support for the city's future growth. It left the city with a complex of performance and entertainment spaces, which in turn sparked an explosion of interest in the performing arts and other cultural activities that have helped make Seattle the world-class city it is today.